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# HOMELESS TRAINING TIPS AND IDEAS

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# HOW VULNERABLE ARE YOU TO BECOMING HOMELESS?

Over the course of a year, up to two million people will experience homelessness at some point (according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty). There is no one reason why individuals and families become homeless. The following survey illustrates some of the factors that can lead to homelessness. When several of these exist, and there are not strong family supports, people can become homeless.

1. Could you ever become involved in a flood, fire, tornado, or other natural disaster?  
Yes? No?
2. Do you work in an area of the economy/job market where your job might become obsolete? Yes? No?
3. Could you ever suffer a long-term illness or accident without proper health benefits or other compensations? Yes? No?
4. Could a downturn in the economy or change in your local economy cause you or family members to lose a job? Yes? No?
5. Do you live in a household with no more than one full-time wage earner? Yes? No?
6. Are you behind in any monthly bills or have you ever received a late notice?  
Yes? No?
7. Are housing costs in your area increasing faster than wages? Yes? No?
8. Does anyone in your family struggle with alcohol/drug or other addictions?  
Yes? No?
9. Has there ever been any form of domestic violence or abuse in your family?  
Yes? No?

Answering yes to one or a few questions does not mean that you will become homeless. It can illustrate that homeless individuals and families are not that different than many of us.

## **FILLING A TRASH BAG**

1. Read this to the group:

Assume that it is late one afternoon and you are home alone. Painters have been repainting your house, and they have left oils rags in your garage. The rags spontaneously combust, and by the time you realize it, it's too late to get the fire out. You call the fire department. You estimate that you have time to fill one large trash bag and get out before the fire spreads to the house.

In one minute (about the time you'd actually have), write down what you'd take from the house- what would you put in the trash bag?

2. Ask a few group members to share what they what they would put in the bag. Then ask for a couple of other responses that were different from those already shared.
3. Ask for a show of hands:
  - How many people remembered to take report cards and other school records for your children?
  - How many people remembered to take immunization records for your children?
4. Lead a brief discussion on how many homeless families are in situations in which they have to leave suddenly- not only fires and natural disasters but also cases in which they find out that an eviction is really going to happen, or a "doubling up" is not permitted. When they don't have school or immunization records when they arrive at school, there may be valid reasons for this.

## **WALKING AROUND IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES**

There are several ways to do this exercise. One would be to have everyone take off their shoes and hand them to the person sitting two seats to the left (or right) of them. Then have each person try on their “new” shoes and see how they fit. Another option is to have people take off their shoes and walk around until they find someone else whose feet look approximately the same size and trade. After trying on the shoes and walking around, participants can then talk about how it feels to be wearing shoes that don't quite fit, or are not in a style in which one is comfortable. Participants can also be encouraged to think about how much more uncomfortable children and teens feel in wearing someone else's shoes and clothes.

## TRAINER TIPS: AWARENESS

1. It is critically important to provide information about homelessness in the specific locality of the people you are training. One of the biggest challenges when covering the topic of homelessness is to avoid dealing solely in abstractions, and confront the very human face of homelessness. Therefore, provide as much particular information about homelessness in your area as possible. There are many different ways to do this; here are some examples:
  - Take the trainees on a tour of local shelters and other agencies that serve people without homes. This will require some advance coordination and logistical work, but is well worth the effort in terms of introducing your trainees to homelessness in your area.
  - Invite guest speakers who are experts on homelessness in your area to make presentations on their area of expertise during your training session. Invite persons such as state homeless education coordinators, school teachers who work in McKinney programs, shelter directors, shelter workers, domestic violence counselors, food bank directors, etc.
  - Invite a person who is experiencing homelessness to speak with your group. Service providers can help you locate an appropriate person.
  - Show a locally produced video about people in homeless situations in your immediate area. Local news programs often run several stories about homelessness over the course of a year. These stories usually focus on either news events that have a homeless component, such as proposed local ordinance or zoning changes, or human interest stories that are associated with an annual event, such as a local homeless awareness day, Veterans Day, or Thanksgiving and Christmas in the shelters. Videotapes of news stories run in the past year can sometimes be obtained from the local TV station library.
  - Provide copies of articles from local newspapers and other print media about homelessness in your immediate area. Recent articles can be obtained either directly from the local newspaper or journal or through the local library.
2. Provide supplemental materials in addition to the information provided in this manual and video. Create a resource library of some of the books and videos mentioned in the resource section and make them available to your trainees. Copy relevant and important sections from several of the books and provide them as part of the training packet.
3. As part of the training sessions, have the trainees play one of the role-playing games, such as H.E.A.R.T.S. (Homeless Experience And Resource Training Simulation, developed by the Dallas Salvation Army), that simulate the process by which people end up becoming homeless.

## **TRAINER TIPS: IDENTIFYING & RECOGNIZING**

1. Develop public outreach goals and strategies with trainees so that they will return to their districts with an outreach plan to reach families, children, and youth in homeless situations.
2. Provide trainees with sample flyers and brochures that can be modified for distribution as outreach materials or for staff development purposes. It should be possible for trainees to take these samples and add pertinent phone numbers, addresses, and other information relevant to their locality.
3. Provide trainees with a list of homeless service providers from their area. Make sure that trainees know the location of all the emergency, runaway, and domestic violence shelters in their attendance areas.
4. Provide trainees with a list of related service providers from their area. Make sure that the trainees know the location of food banks and clothing providers and medical, dental, and counseling resources in their area. Trainees should be able to make referrals to these resources.
5. Develop staff development goals and strategies with trainees so that they will have a plan to train district and school staff at all levels about homeless education and the McKinney Act.
6. Work with trainees to develop a homeless transportation plan for their region.

## **TRAINER TIPS: CREATING SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS IN HOMELESS SITUATIONS**

1. Conduct a brainstorming session in which trainees list all the things that they can do immediately at their schools to facilitate the education of children and youth without homes. Make sure to list all the ideas that are mentioned so that everyone can see (and take notes on) the list of suggestions.
2. Have trainees give examples of individuals in their districts they might recommend to serve as homeless liaisons in addition to those who are already liaisons through McKinney projects. Have trainees create a job description that could be used in hiring someone to be a homeless liaison.
3. Conduct a brainstorming session in which trainees list all the programs in their schools that should be working closely together to provide services to children and youth in homeless situations. Describe ways in which the programs could work together. Make sure to list all the ideas that are mentioned so that everyone can see (and take notes on) the list of suggestions.
4. Conduct a brainstorming session in which trainees list all of the service agencies, either local or state-level, with which they should be working to ensure that necessary services are provided to children and youth without homes. Make sure to list all the ideas that are mentioned so that everyone can see (and take notes on) the list of suggestions.
5. Have trainees describe their current enrollment procedures and policies in detail, including records required to enroll and record transfer procedures. Ask trainees to 1) identify the components of these procedures and policies that might be problematic for students in homeless situations and 2) propose solutions to these areas of difficulty for enrolling students in homeless situations.